



Zillah
Eisenstein

Sexual Decoys

**gender, race
and war**

IN IMPERIAL DEMOCRACY

About this book

In this book, Zillah Eisenstein continues her unforgiving indictment of neoliberal imperial politics. She charts its most recent militarist and masculinist configurations through discussions of the Afghan and Iraq wars, violations at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, the 2004 US Presidential election, and Hurricane Katrina. She warns that women's rights rhetoric is being manipulated, particularly by Condoleezza Rice and other women in the Bush administration, as a ploy for global dominance and a misogynistic capture of democratic discourse. However, Eisenstein also believes that the plural and diverse lives of women will lay the basis for an assault on these fascistic elements. This new politics will both confound and clarify feminisms, and reconfigure democracy across the globe.

About the author

Zillah Eisenstein is one of the foremost political theorists and activists of our time. She has written feminist theory in North America for the past twenty-five years. Her writing is an integral part of her political activism. She writes in order to share and learn with, and from, others engaged in political struggles for social justice. She writes about her work building coalitions across women's differences: the black/white divide in the US; the struggles of Serb and Muslim women in the war in Bosnia; the needs of women health workers in Cuba; the commitments of environmentalists in Ghana; the relationship between socialists and feminists in union organizing; the struggles against extremist fundamentalisms in Egypt and Afghanistan; the needs of women workers in India.

Zillah Eisenstein is Professor of Politics at Ithaca College in New York. Throughout her career her books have tracked the rise of neoliberalism both within the US and across the globe. She has documented the demise of liberal democracy and scrutinized the growth of imperial and militarist globalization. She has also critically written about the attack on affirmative action in the US, the masculinist bias of law, the crisis of breast cancer and AIDS, the racism of patriarchy and the patriarchal structuring of race, the new nationalisms, and corporatist multiculturalism.

Her most recent books include: *Against Empire* (London, Zed Books, 2004), *Hatreds: Racialised and Sexualised Conflicts in the 21st Century* (New York, Routledge, 1996), *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Lure of Cyberfantasy* (New York, NYU Press, 1998), *ManMade Breast Cancers* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001).

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*Gender, Race and War
in Imperial Democracy*

Zillah Eisenstein



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... to all those who risk hoping for new ways of being

Preface

January 2006 is a hard month. Snow covers the ground but it is iced and dirty, not new and clean. It is cold ... and with gas and fuel at record highs in the US, most of us are living chillier lives than before. The recent past has included the exposing of the torture at Abu Ghraib, the re-election of George Bush, and then the horrors of the tsunami and hurricane Katrina with their continuing devastation. The American public is told that our president has secretly authorized the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on us as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq limp forward. There is greater surveillance, while dissent is criminalized. More and more is made visible and visual, while there is less and less power to change the picture.

I start here with a heavy heart to uncover the new in these 'new-old' scenarios.¹ I look to trace and uncover the racialized and gendered silenced stories of this militarized moment of global capitalist racialized patriarchy. These entire scenarios are man-made by so-called manly men – but men can be either male or female, white or 'other-than'. Racialized gender operates as a decoy. Men can be male-identified males or females given that there are male- and female-bodied men. As such, there are more than two sexes and more than two genders and yet politically we are said and made to be male and female, man and woman.

So sex and gender and race can be used as decoys because their meanings can always be multiple and varied at the same time that they are ossified. Sex and gender, though distinct and multiple, are more often than not collapsed as one. The variations of femaleness and femininity, and maleness and masculinity, stand counter to the homogeneity of heteronormative gender. This creates confusing, illegible, and unknowable readings and meanings.² The unreadable aspects of sex, gender, and race allow for their deceptive role today as sometime decoys for imperial and fascistic democracy. But gender cannot always or completely be

deceiving or it would not work as a decoy. This increases the difficulty of reading the meanings of sex and gender and race. The complex decoy process – of allure, deception, and entrapment – defines history and also takes on ‘new–old’ historical meanings. War makes these processes more visible and contested. It is this racializing and gendering of politics that I wish to see more clearly for today. Yet the language itself almost makes it impossible to think with these complexities.

I am looking for ‘unthinkable facts’, needing new ‘instruments of thought’, wanting to conceptualize without the categories to do so.³ There is female and male masculinity; and male and female femininity. Condoleezza Rice embodies this decoy status as she makes war for white men. And veiled Muslim women become the decoys of and for wars of terror – by both imperial and Islamic insurgent misogynists. Read on if this is not clear to you.

My focus now is to see how the particular moment of war and militarism continues to transform and reconfigure the meaning of gender along with its relationship to the sexed and raced body. I look to explain and reveal the newest fluidities of gender that disconnect the meanings of the female body from its gendered formation. So more females today are in the military, are affected by wars, are militarized in their private lives, are in fighting forces in third-world countries, are immigrants and refugees, and this destabilizes entrenched gender meanings while the privilege of a racialized masculinity also remains in place, even if changed. While using women’s rights discourse as a cover and ploy for global dominance, females like Condi Rice and Hillary Clinton articulate the newest imperial democracy that only further complicates things.

This *may* be a critical historical juncture where gender will be truly destabilized with the help of feminisms across the globe; *or* masculinist formulations of gender in defense of imperial democracy may hold sway but in more variegated forms. In just the past year there have been a series of firsts: women have been elected president in Chile, Germany, and Liberia, Cecelia Fire Thunder has been elected leader of the Oglala Sioux tribe, Tzipi Livni serves as the first Israeli foreign minister since Golda Meir, and six women were elected to the newly chosen Hamas parliament. The meanings of each of these happenings are not clearly obvious. Some of these victories reflect enormous political struggle and achievement. Each of my chapters deals with different aspects of the making of sexes and genders and races; the gendering of war, the militarizing of

gender, and the multiplicity of patriarchies and therefore feminisms. Gender remains incredibly complex and confused amidst these changes. On the one hand so much is changing ... and on the other it is not clear what exactly is changed.

Greater varieties and expressions of gender and sexuality exist for my daughter than did for me; women are present in new and different sites; patriarchy is more differentiated and complex, creating more choice and variability; and there are also greater restrictions on many of the choices given neoliberal privatization across the globe. It is harder to get an abortion today in the US than a decade ago. More male and female teenagers engage in oral sex today and say that this is not sex. In the fall of 2005 a TV series – *Commander-in-Chief* – was broadcast about a woman president. Yet, females have not regendered the military. And the wars of/on terror often morph into talk about sex and gender while conflating them.

I trace the development of gender fluidity and racial diversity, rather than equality, in this militarized moment as oftentimes anti-democratic. And I will argue that the diversity that exists within women's lives today across the globe should not be confused with sexual or gender equality or justice and that it also sometimes means exactly this. And that the co-optation of racial diversity of the few, for the displacement of racial equality for the many, underpins the horrific moves towards right-wing fanaticism. So there are the processes of resexing gender – females acting like men; re-gendering gender – women becoming more modern and diverse as women; e-racing race – blacks becoming Clarence Thomas or Colin Powell; re-racing race – black women becoming white. Do not misinterpret these political processes as essentialist and static. The brilliance is in the constant exceptionalism. The difficulty is with essentializing categories that I mean to displace.

President Bush did not mention the Iraq war in his 2005 inaugural address and instead focused all eyes on his struggle for freedom and liberty – at home and abroad. “The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.” He said that America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling, because they must find their own way and voice.⁴ He promised to bring unity to the country – despite the so-called blue (liberal) and red (conservative) states. His democratic message codes politics as war. Within a few months, as discontent for the war mounts, speaking at the National

Endowment for Democracy he is more defensive and aggressive although not more truthful. “We will not rest until the war on terror is won.” He says the choices are simple: between freedom’s triumph or Islamic radicalism and its militant Jihadism/Islamo-fascism. He reiterates his stance again – that the US will never back down and will accept nothing less than complete victory. He speaks of the “murderous” ideology of Islamic radicals and compares it to the struggle against communism, also an ideology with “cold-blooded contempt for human life”. Islamic radicals have ambitions of “imperial domination” while they “brutalize their women”. Iraq is the launching pad for all that is evil. America will stay the course.⁵ By March 2006, with support for the war waning, Bush is very much more on the defensive.

On October 8, 2005 the US public awaited the indictments of Scooter Libby and Karl Rove for their role in leaking information about a CIA agent – Valerie Palme – the wife of Joseph Wilson, in order to punish him for challenging Bush’s claims about Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction. This same morning National Public Radio (NPR) led with a news story charging the CIA with the murder and torture of detainees held in the Afghan and Iraq wars. On the one hand the US government appears rational and legal as it charges offenders with lying; and on the other hand torture and death are condoned. This is what neoliberal fascism, or fascistic democracy, must look like; what militant global capitalism necessitates. The war on terror has destroyed the remnants of democracy through the militarization of us all. The always troubled emancipatory rhetoric dating back to the Enlightenment appears to have been *almost entirely* displaced by terror rhetoric.

Once again I am at a loss for words to help me think. There is little new in the claim that liberal/Western/bourgeois democracy has never been fully democratic, or that it is wrong to conflate Western-style democracy with democracy itself.⁶ Today, neoliberal forms of democracy parade as though they too are one and the same with democracy and position themselves against Islam as such. Although Western democracy has an imperial past and present, it also now newly articulates fascistic neoliberal practices. I use both ‘neoliberal fascism’ and ‘fascistic democracy’ as terms of alarm for present tendencies in the US. Although these tendencies may appear to be exceptions, they also can too easily become the rule. The slide from and between neoliberal and fascistic democracy can only be seen from particular sites.

Many Germans said they did not know about the extermination of more than 6 million Jews during Nazism. For them, ordinary life continued. Today ordinary life continues for many of us in the US while it does not continue as such for those detained elsewhere, or those who are wire-tapped, or incarcerated in Guantanamo. Whether one calls these actions exceptions – to the rule of law – depends upon where one is located and from what position one speaks. This kind of exceptionalism leads towards the newly forming fascistic democracy, and away from an Enlightenment liberal and neoliberal reading constrained by the promise of legal rights for all.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are destroying the soul of America. Bombs are dropped indiscriminately, bodies are maimed, prisoners of war have no rights, Guantanamo continues to house inmates illegally. Tsunamis and hurricanes ravage poor people's lives and the US government offers belated charity but not social justice. Katrina uncovers racism and poverty that many in the US say they did not know existed, and I wonder if Halliburton will once again be the true beneficiary of all this misery.

The new lawlessness of the Bush administration both at home and abroad fully neglects democratic discourse. The newness locates today's enemies at home as much as abroad. Muslims, South Asians, Latinas, El Salvadoreans, Pakistanis, Somalians are located in New York, New Jersey, Minnesota, California. Those who came to America to escape violence and persecution now wonder where that America has gone. Since September 11, 2001 they have lost the freedom they came here seeking. They say that our prisons and detention centers are worse than the refugee camps they have been in elsewhere. War rhetoric has licensed new undemocratic processes: from racial profiling to enforced registrations, to racist round-ups and deportations.⁷

To the rest of the world, the US, especially since the Abu Ghraib scandal, no longer stands for human rights doctrine, no matter how limited the actual practice may have been earlier. We are no longer as welcoming a nation to the world's migrants, exiles, and refugees. In the name of 'security' we mistake people in need for criminals and terrorists. As Edwidge Danticat says of her ageing Haitian uncle: "My uncle was treated like a criminal when his only offense was thinking that he could find shelter in the United States." She continues: "A zone is being locked in place on the outer perimeter of the United States where the constitution is no longer fully operable."⁸

We are becoming more unlike our better selves as exceptions are made. To the wife and son of a man the CIA detained, tortured, and killed in Afghanistan, the US government is no different than fascists. Racialized gender and sex operate as both cover and deception – as though democracy exists because Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice exist – and as exposure – as in the sexual and racial violations in the prisons of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. Amidst this cacophony it is no longer clear, if it ever was, who or what a woman is, and/or what it means or should mean to be African American. Color trumps race; gender trumps sex. And, patriarchal/racialized hetero-masculinity has authorized and normalized a privileged white womanhood.

Females like Condi Rice and Sandra Day O'Connor do the bidding of imperial power while women and girls join militaries almost everywhere as part of the newly militarized global economy. The new diversity of choice for gender sites, alongside their racialized identities, defines this militarized historical moment. The economy runs strong for only a very few. Everyone I know seems to be driven and too busy. Professional jobs are being restructured and changed and we pretend that they are the same. Work of all sorts is leaving the country for elsewhere. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq make no sense no matter what your politics is and yet they continue. We are exposed as humiliators and torturers and continue with arrogance to do the same.

There is less accountability as the nation-state is privatized for the needs of global capital. The newly defined wars of/on terror have undermined the nation which was a key site for articulating racialized gender. This undermining, or reconfiguring, of the nation loosens and deregulates the patriarchal site of 'the' family. Hence the transitional and conflictual relationship within and between the relations of public and private life.

With militarization everywhere, given the wars of/on terror previous notions of war, peace, civilian, and combatant are dislocated along with the rigidity of gender and race. A militarized economy rooted in war constructs new rules for neoliberal and fascistic imperial democracy. Global capital, with its need for privatization, becomes less and less able to afford the messiness of democracy. Just-in-time flexible and fluid configurations are always constructed from the vantage point of the powerful.

War is fictionalized as spectacular and exceptional rather than common and everyday and personal. Many of us privileged at the site of empire can remain removed and distant. In the US, too many can keep from

wondering how people survive in Iraq, or how they themselves would survive if they were there. So Cindy Sheehan, the now well-known mother of a son, Casey, who was killed in Iraq, camped outside Bush's Crawford, Texas, ranch demanding to speak with him. She publicized the war as up-close and personal. She was arrested at the 2006 State of the Union address because she was wearing a T-shirt reading: 2244 DEAD. She says later of the arrest that she wept because she has lost not only her son Casey, but also her First Amendment rights and with them the country she has loved.⁹

Riverbend, the young Iraqi woman writing a daily blog, describes the dreariness of everyday life in war. She writes about the lack of electricity and water, about the unrelenting heat, and the night-time raids which meant people went to bed in their clothes, and the shortages of gasoline and its high cost. She writes of the daily life that doesn't happen, the daily routines that no longer exist. War is not just about dying; it is about living a life that isn't worth living. She says of Iraq that "no one is 13 anymore"; that everyone is 85.¹⁰

In the US there is more and more control of everything – even our memory, or lack of it. The militarization of everyday life has people fearful rather than emboldened. We watch the devastation produced by hurricane Katrina and floods in Mississippi and Alabama and find it 'unspeakable'. The racism, the poverty, the huge numbers of displaced women and children of the poor are unthinkable. As Jenny Edkins writes, we lack a language to help us with our betrayal by our country. "After traumatic events, there is a struggle over memory. Some forms of remembering can be seen as ways of forgetting..."¹¹ Bush used the Katrina tragedy to call for greater militarization, suggesting that it would be preferable for the military to be in charge when natural/national disasters hit. Militia rule for New Orleans.

The amount of mediation between our bodies and the rule of law, as in torture, is disregarded. Lying has replaced misrepresentation. The notion of 'normal juridical order' is less and less clear; and the 'state of exception' has started to become the rule.¹² The US government has moved beyond the rule of law while policing the world with impunity. There is total control of media, and the control is not exactly total.

The conceptual deficit that disallows the naming of racialized gender as central to the reconfigurations of power allows its decoy status for anti-democratic rule. More women and people of color are to be seen every-

where. This is the truth and falsity of the globe. The manipulation of race and gender as decoys for democracy reveals the corruptibility of identity politics. Not until women had the vote could they know its insufficiencies for changing their lives. Not until civil rights movement activists gained an end to legal discrimination could they know its insufficiencies for ending racism. Not until apartheid was ended in South Africa could blacks know its full complexities. And not until militarism is seen for its masculinist heteronormative gendering can war be viewed as always anti-theoretical to peace; or the full complex array of feminisms which imagine a socially just, inclusive world come into view.

Notes

- 1 See my *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) for a discussion of how the new is always historically connected to the old in the phrasing 'new-old'.
- 2 For a compelling discussion of the historical unreadability of multiple sexualities see: Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 3 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), p. 82.
- 4 [www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural/January 20, 2005](http://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural/January%20,2005).
- 5 www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051006-3.html.
- 6 C.B. MacPherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
- 7 Tram Nguyen, ed., *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant Communities after 9/11* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), pp. 80–81.
- 8 Edwidge Danticat, "Not Your Homeland", *The Nation*, vol. 281, no. 9 (September 26, 2005), pp. 23, 26. See also her foreword in Tram Nguyen, ed., *We Are All Suspects Now*.
- 9 Cindy Sheehan, "What Really Happened", February 2, 2006, at www.truthout.org/docs.
- 10 Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning* (New York: Feminist Press, 2005), p. 11. See also: <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/>.
- 11 Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 16.
- 12 Giorgio Agamben. "Means Without End: Notes on Politics", *Theory Out Of Bounds*, vol. 20 (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 38.

1

Gender as Politics in Another Form

In December 2003 the US was on code orange alert. Air France canceled its Christmas Eve flights because of information that they might be used to 'hit' targets in New York City or Los Angeles. Meanwhile *The Last Samurai* played in theatres romanticizing the Eastern warrior – through the visor of yoga and life's harmony – and humanized war in Eastern fashion. Death – in war – is honorable despite the fact that the samurai fights on behalf of the emperor and other hierarchies of power. The wife of the slain samurai falls in love with his killer. She is deferential and suffering and therefore noble as well. *Elephant* also played in our theatres. It tells the story of the massacre at Columbine High School and the sad effects of a militarized culture. This same season the Vietnam War is the backdrop for explaining the unexplainable in life in *The Human Stain*, a story about racial self-hatred and passing for white while black.

In 2004 a remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* is produced. It is a story about a fictional right-wing senator who happens to be both female and a mother. She manipulates and betrays her son, and abandons all morals to create a world of complete surveillance and mind control. In the remade film we see people having their brains drilled for implants and total manipulation, and I cannot help but wonder if this is a form of the mindlessness that allowed Bush his second term. And I wonder if the film is a kind of whitewash: that filmgoers look at this depiction of the world and fantasize that they are free because they are not having their brains drilled.

In 2005, *King Kong* is remade in old form. The beast and natives are still black but made more horrific and terrifying by new digital tech. The beauty is still white and blonde. Misogyny is still the trope: warring factions define human life, be they digital dinosaurs or unfathomable creatures or helpless white men. Females still love anything that protects them.

In real life, war rages in Afghanistan and Iraq but as a backdrop and not front and center. These wars are mired in discourses about democracy and

women's rights to be free from abusive lives under the Taliban or Saddam Hussein. Neither of these wars were committed to freeing women so it remains critically important to think through why these were the particular narratives at this specific point in historic time.

Human rights – and with them women's rights – have been used to mystify and rationalize the misogynist and racialized aspects of global capitalism. Women's rights as a discourse both legitimizes democracy and critiques other-than-Western forms of democracy simultaneously. As such, women's rights parades as Western to the rest of the world. But it is closer to the truth, if there are truths to be found here, that masculinist militarism uses women's rights for right-wing agendas inside and outside the West. Right-wing fundamentalisms of all sorts – east and west – emphasize militarist agendas alongside the gendering of women's lives, with or without the veil/chador/abayya/burqa, as decoy.

Bush's wars of/on terror have authorized a culture of racial intimidation and surveillance while establishing gender confusions to mask this process. New forms of this militarized process create larger numbers of women as the refugees and displaced people of the world, as the rape victims in many locations like Sudan and Nepal, as the new warriors for the US military and as suicide bombers in Palestine and Iraq. Sometimes it looks like women are becoming more like men; if being militarized is the same as being masculinized. But I think similarity is not what is simply happening here but rather that the constructions of gender are being more fully diversified *and* essentialized simultaneously.

In this militarized setting masculinity and femininity are becoming more complex but not necessarily more equal. The redefinition looks newly different, but is more 'new-old' than new. Gender is being mobilized for new purposes and refashioned in more 'modern' fashion. Differentiation of women from men remains and yet they each occupy more like spheres in similarly different fashion. Militarized masculinity still needs a hetero-feminine gendered complement; and each keeps the other in place.¹ So gender codes the Afghan and Iraq wars. It is also not inherently biological. Gender regulates sex and sexuality that are more ambiguous than they are certain. And gender is reshaped continually in order also to shape and control sexual meanings. King Kong still lives.

On gendering sex

Gendering is the process of transforming females to women and males to men when neither of these starting points is completely autonomous from their transformed state. Gendering is a process of differentiating supposed heterosexuality – of making gendered difference matter by institutionalizing it.

It is often thought that sexuality – as in biological sex and sexual preference – is more stable, or static, and predefined, than gender. But I continue to query whether gender – as in the cultural construction of masculine and feminine – is not more static and contrived and more resistant to change.² In this way gender rigidifies sex; gender regulates sex and sexual preference, as much as, if not more than, the other way around. This is not to overdraw the distinctness of sex and gender but rather to query whether the body's sexuality is not more ambiguous and multiple and diverse than the constructs of gender allow. Or, put slightly differently, it is to propose that gender exists to control sex and its variability. Gender makes biological sex and sexuality static and rigid. The point: neither sex nor gender is simply essentialist or constructed: they are a complex relational mix. But, given this, the sexual body is probably more fluid than its gendered meaning. Yet the biological body – meaning both the so-called 'natural body' and its given heterosexual proclivities – are normalized as a justification for the cultural meanings of men and women. In sum: gender colonizes sex.

According to Anne Fausto-Sterling, "labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision"; actual physical bodies blur clear boundaries. She argues that the state and legal system may have an interest in maintaining that there are only two sexes, but that "our collective biological bodies do not". She believes that "masculinity and femininity are cultural conceits"; that the "two party system" of sex is a social construction, and that male and female "stand on extreme ends of a biological continuum" with many other kinds of bodies which are a "complex mix of anatomical components". As such, our sexual bodies are "indeterminate" and therefore "policed" to become male and female.

It follows both that biology as well as gender is political and that the more gender is challenged the more rigidly sex is constructed as either male or female. This extends to hormones themselves that Fausto-Sterling says are identified as though they were sexually determinant, but rather are

simply part of an already “gendered discourse of scientists”. Citing Frank Lillie, Fausto-Sterling states that there is “no such biological entity as sex”: it is merely a name for our impressions about sexual differences. Sex is not fact here. It is random acts of science that name male hormones androgens and female hormones estrogen.³

According to Joanne Meyerowitz there are “overlapping sexes”; possibly a universal bisexuality. Men and women have male and female hormones – “all women had elements of the male and all men elements of the female”. Thus it is scientifically inaccurate to “classify people as fully male or female”.⁴ In this sense, biology is not simply innate or genetically determined. Nancy Krieger and George Davey Smith write that “societal conditions shape the expression of biological traits”, that there are “linkages between bodily constitution and the body’s politics”.⁵ New constructs of sexes and genders reflect this fluidity. Krieger argues that self-identified transgender, transsexual and intersexual individuals blur the established boundaries within the gender/sex dichotomy. Gender influences biological traits and sex-linked biological characteristics can affect gender.⁶

Similarly Susan Oyama queries the distinction made between nature and nurture and says that each is partly constructed by and through the other. She rejects the notion of biology as an innate category and instead argues that innate and acquired characteristics are complexly intertwined – that genes are complexly interactional and change as a result of context. “Bodies and minds are constructed, not transmitted.” As such, nature is a product and a process: “nature is not transmitted but constructed”. The biological/sexual body includes our whole selves “which includes the social worlds in which we are made”. Oyama asks us to reject the “disciplinary imperialism” of “genetic control”.⁷

It is, then, crucial to understand that gender impinges on how we see and name the sexual body; and the sexual body is used to justify the very notion of gender. Gender even defines the sexed body and the sexed body constructs gender. There are more than two sexes. And there are more than two genders. Yet the language of twoness dominates. This means that both sex and gender are part of the most intimate constructions of our political world; so black slave women were seen as breeders, and not as mothers *per se*. As slaves they were denied the gender of white women. And sex and gender along with their racial meanings become politics by other means.

So there is always the process of gendering sex and gendering gender; and sexing gender and sexing sex; and regendering gender, and resexing

sex, and racializing sex and sexing race and racializing gender... The political – power-filled – dynamics are multiple and chaotic. The plasticity and variability of sex and race may be less visible/visual than the multiplicity of gender. And the complexity of gender identities is defined by one's sexual origins, and supposedly not by race. Hence, female-bodied women, male-identified females, and so on.⁸

Judith Butler has long argued that gender is made-up, performed, plastic, improvised, and multiple. Enforced gender categorization is tied to an “anatomical essentialism” when there is no simple original form of the copy. She thinks that many so-called men can do femininity better than she can. A universal notion of gender can be a form of cultural imperialism – so we need to pluralize our understanding of both cultures and their genders. If gender dysphoria and sexual minorities can be embraced and recognized in the human community, then Butler says we must focus on the possible. “For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity.”⁹

The idea that there are two biological sexes is, then, in and of itself a political limitation/regulation that depends on a formulation of gender as twoness also. Sexual and gender classifications are regulatory and by and large stand in defiance of the fluidity and changeability of sexual and gender identities. Sex is assigned at birth; but through a gendered biological visor. According to Paisley Currah this denies chromosomal ambiguity, gonadal ambiguity, gender pluralism and sexual indeterminacy.¹⁰ One could instead start with a notion of trans- and multi-genders: a male who thinks he is a woman or a female who thinks she is a man; or a male and a female who are each neither and who think they are neither man or woman.

But there is no adequate language to embrace this complexity, and we re-create gender while debunking it: female lesbians, female men, et cetera. Sexual and gender indeterminacy needs to become a part of a radically pluralized sex/gender system allowing for a democratic sexual life that is freely chosen. The presumption of essentialist biological/ innate gender categories still remains firmly in place, however, even when it is scrutinized. Lawrence Summers, former president of Harvard University, explains that women are underrepresented in tenured science positions at top universities because of “intrinsic aptitude”, a concept sounding awfully close to “innate differences”: as though scientists are born, and not made.¹¹

The politics of sexing gender and gendering sex is embedded in the discussions and changes in gay marriage at present, while still race remains

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